

The Human Side

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES • SUMMER 2004

The mission of the Georgia Department of Human Resources is to assist Georgians in achieving healthy, independent and self-sufficient lives.

Commissioner's Corner

I am happy to have this opportunity to share my thoughts regarding DHR, our future as an agency and the good we can do for the people of Georgia. Since the Board of Human Resources appointed me commissioner in May I've been very busy, but you have never been absent from my thoughts. I know you've been eager to find out how I plan to make a difference.

First of all, this is a big job. DHR is a large agency with an even larger mission. We have 19,000 staff working in every county to promote the health, safety and wellbeing of every Georgian. We have a budget of \$2.6 billion. Georgia's taxpayers provide \$1.4 billion in state funds as well as their share of \$1.2 billion in federal funds.

Secondly, our agency faces growing needs in a difficult budget environment. We respond to more than 80,000 reports of child abuse and neglect every year. Tens of thousands of Georgians need mental health services and treatment for addictive diseases. People with developmental disabilities need services in their communities — close to their home and family. The fastest growing segment of our population are those over age 60; they want to live with dignity and independence.

How can we rise to meet these challenges? We can start by bringing our values to work as we serve the people of Georgia. Each workday involves many decisions. Which policy applies? How should I interpret the rules? Do what I do: Ask yourself what you would do if the decision involved a family member. What

would you do if this were your child, your mother, your brother? Ask that question and then do that work. If we keep asking that question, we will do the right thing time and time again.

Also, we can set priorities. I want my initial priorities to be clear. We must improve our child welfare system so that children are safe and in nurturing, permanent homes. We also must restructure the



B.J. Walker

way we deliver services for people with mental illness, developmental disabilities and addictive diseases. We need accessible, accountable, and well-managed services that respect the needs and wishes of consumers and their families.

I want to raise the bar. Our goal is to become the nation's premier human services agency. We should not be content with out-performing our neighbors in Alabama, Tennessee and South Carolina. We want to lead the way nationally.

Raising the bar will involve all of us and our many partners. We can do this by being creative and maintaining our com-

mitment to strong values.

The public doesn't always understand how hard our jobs are, but we know when we have done a good job. We have had a good day when a person with developmental disabilities moves into a high quality group home closer to family. We have done a good job when we help a senior avoid moving to a nursing home. We have had a good day when parents exercise and eat right so they can be there for their families. We have had a very good day when we reconnect a child with family and restore this vital connection. Whether you work in administrative support or directly with families, you all contribute to these successes on a daily basis just by doing good work in this department.

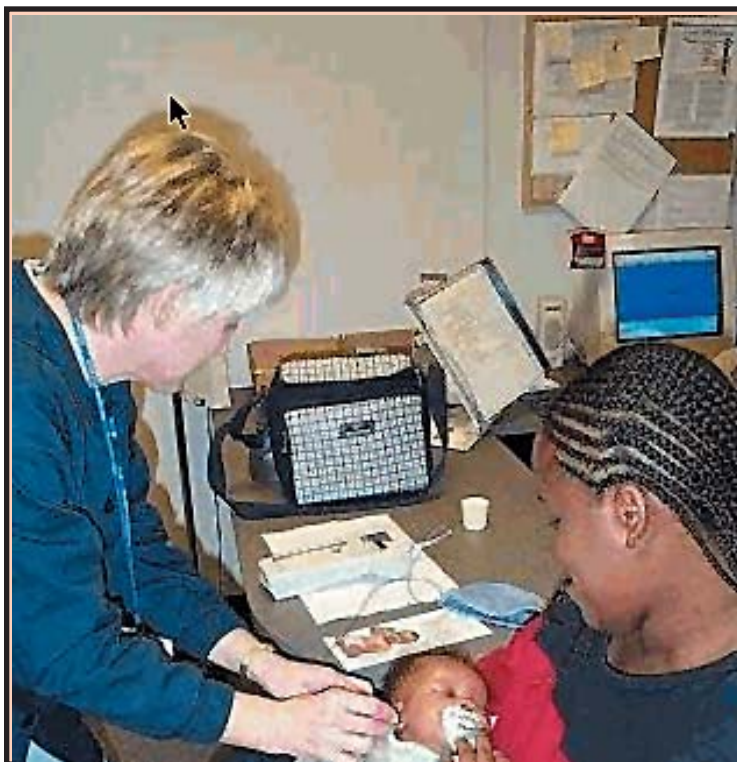
However, we cannot do this work alone. We must aggressively expand our partnerships with political, civic and business leaders as well as members of the faith-based community and advocates.

Challenges are sometimes intimidating, but I always find them exciting. I hope you do too. We should enjoy our work and the pride of work well done.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B.J. Walker'.

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Ann Carter, R.N., B.S.N., a public health nurse specialist with the Floyd County Health Department, won second prize in the Georgia Public Health Association's 2003 photography contest for submitting this shot of Public Health in action: "Hear the latest news about Newborn Hearing Screening - It works!" Carter is the nurse on the left. **Linda Bell, R.N.** of the Floyd County Health Department was the photographer. GPHA will announce the 2004 contest winners in September. CORRECTION: The third place winning photo, which ran in the spring Human Side, was submitted by Nurse Practitioner **Myra Belcher R.N., C.S., F.N.P.**, but it was taken by Program Associate **Misti Gentry** and shows **Micky Tasker, R.N.**; all work for the Bartow County Health Department.

Aging and Disability Resource Centers to Open in Atlanta, Augusta

Aging parents of children with developmental disabilities often become frustrated as they go from one agency to another trying to plan for their children's future. Soon, "one-stop shopping" resource centers in Atlanta and Augusta will provide comprehensive help for finding long-term care services for both seniors with physical disabilities and people of all ages with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities.

The centers will be funded with an \$800,000 three-year grant from the federal Administration on Aging and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, awarded in April to the Division of Aging Services (DAS). They will be operated by the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) that serve the two cities: The Atlanta Regional Commission in Atlanta and the Central Savannah

River Area Agency on Aging in Augusta.

The resource centers will be phased in over the next three years. They will work in cooperation with local community organizations and the local offices of the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases and Division of Family and Children Services.

The new resource centers will help consumers and family caregivers who need either public or private services, regardless of ability to pay. They will provide information, referrals, screening, assessment, crisis intervention, short-term case management until people are connected with services, and help with planning to meet people's needs so they can continue living in their communities. An advisory group and a consumer task force were

formed last year to guide the development of the centers.

"I am excited by this opportunity to help more families meet the challenges of providing long-term care for loved ones with disabilities," says DAS Director **Maria Greene**. "Our 'Gateway' program already offers a comprehensive system for referring older people to services that help them remain in their homes instead of entering nursing homes prematurely. We will adapt this to include services for people with developmental disabilities."

Currently, 12 AAAs throughout the state provide information and referrals for older Georgians, while seven regional offices of DHR's Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases provide information and referrals, primarily to public ser-

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GeorgiaCares Educates Thousands on Medicare Updates



Rose Beck, Coastal GeorgiaCares coordinator (left), counsels Medicare beneficiaries during the Coastal Georgia Regional Development Center's Medicare 2 Seniors event in May.

The Division of Aging Services' GeorgiaCares program launched a "Medicare 2 Seniors: Information to Families" public awareness campaign in May to help Medicare beneficiaries understand their choices with the new Medicare-approved drug discount cards. GeorgiaCares partnered with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Social Security Administration, WSB-TV, Channel 2 and the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) to provide comprehensive, timely and accurate information to seniors.

More than 7,400 seniors and their families participated in 24 information fairs statewide sponsored by AARP, CVS Pharmacy, Novartis and Publix. These fairs provided information on changes in the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 which went into effect June 1, 2004 when the new discount drug cards became available — a temporary measure until prescription drug insurance under Medicare begins in 2006. In addition, GeorgiaCares' 450 trained volunteer coordinators made presentations and did one-on-one and telephone counseling to help seniors

navigate through the Medicare updates.

"During May, calls to our hotline increased by 33 percent with a total of 4,000. The call volume continues to be high with a reported 2,000 calls in the first two weeks of June," said **Jennie D. Deese**, GeorgiaCares director.

"GeorgiaCares and the AAAs will continue to provide numerous outreach and educational sessions to reach all Medicare beneficiaries in Georgia through the duration of the changes in the Medicare Modernization Act."

Currently, Georgia has 40 Medicare-approved discount cards and 975,000 Medicare beneficiaries. The cards with Medicare's seal of approval can provide 10-25 percent savings on prescription drugs through December 31, 2005. This is a voluntary program provided by private card sponsors. Beneficiaries with limited incomes of \$12,569 for a single person, or \$16,862 for a married couple might qualify for a \$600 credit to help pay for prescription drugs.

For more information, contact GeorgiaCares toll-free at 1-800-669-8387 or 404-463-8578.

— Edna Jackson

Safety at Two Peachtree Street

Do you have concerns about working in — or visiting — a high-rise office building like Two Peachtree Street in Atlanta? Are you unsure about its safety features or what you should do in the event a fire alarm is sounded?

Don't feel alone....There are many others just like you.

The Two Peachtree building is approaching the end of a 12-year program of renovations and refurbishment. While it is over 35 years old, many of its mechanical and safety systems have been completely replaced and upgraded. These include many sensors of different types designed to maintain a safe environment and alert maintenance managers when the conditions they monitor move outside acceptable ranges. Some of these conditions could cause the building, or a portion of it, to be unsafe for occupancy according to the building codes.

For example, if water pressure in part of the sprinkler system falls, that part of the building may no longer be protected adequately if a fire starts there, so it should be evacuated. Even though there's no fire, an audible "fire alarm" will automatically sound in the affected area, along with an automated announcement informing occupants of that area to evacuate. For the hearing impaired, bright strobe lights begin blinking. To ensure that people who might be in the stairwell do not enter the area,

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No More Paper Checks: DHR Leads the Nation

Georgia is the second state in the nation to eliminate paper checks for child support payments by substituting debit cards and direct deposit, and the first in the nation to also do the same for employee paychecks. Iowa was the first state to stop using paper checks for child support payments. Several other states currently have pilot programs for child support recipients, but Georgia's program involves the largest number of participants.

From now on, DHR employees will receive their salaries through either direct deposit or a debit card. The new system is expected to save \$250,000 per year in printing and postage costs and eliminate the inconvenience of lost or stolen checks. Other improvements to the system will result in additional sav-



ings over the next two years, according to **John Sartain**, director of the Office of Financial Services (OFS).

"Eventually, we plan to go to an electronic pay stub, in which case more printing and staff costs will be saved. Employees who do not have computer access will be able to request their personnel office to pull up their stub and print it for them," says Sartain.

More than half of DHR's employees were already using direct deposit

when OFS announced the end of paper checks this spring. Debit cards were offered as another option and sent to anyone not choosing direct deposit. The last paper checks were issued July 15.

Georgia parents who receive child support have also been given the choice of debit cards or direct deposit for receiving their payments,

instead of checks. Eliminating paper checks for child support recipients is expected to save \$6 million a year in postage, printing, and administrative costs, according to **Robert Riddle**, Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) director.

Even under ideal conditions, child support checks took from three to ten days to arrive after the non-custodial parents or their employers submitted a payment. If the recipient moved with no forwarding address, the check was returned to OCSE. Now, payments can arrive within two days in a custodial parent's debit card or bank account, and the family's address is not an issue.

The debit cards, known as EPPI-Card™ MasterCard, can be used for a purchase — and in many cases a cash withdrawal — at any business that accepts MasterCard debit cards, and for a withdrawal at any MasterCard bank and at any ATM with a MasterCard, Maestro or Cirrus logo. Users do not have to pay any fees to use the EPPICard™ MasterCard, except for withdrawals from an ATM. The EPPI-Card™ MasterCard customer service number is 1-800-656-1347.

— Barbara Joye

Serving Parents Better

Georgia parents receiving or paying child support can now use a computer instead of the phone to review their payments; request copies of checks or stop payment on a check; view the status of their cases; and update their address and employer information. Those receiving payments can set up or cancel direct deposit of payments into their bank accounts. All this is possible thanks to a new "Constituent Services portal" unveiled in June by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE).

The expanded service, available on Georgia's portal: www.ga.gov, builds on "Where's My Child's Check?" — a more limited Internet application that has been available to the public on the portal since October 2002. All information is confidential and protected by security measures such as passwords and PIN numbers.

"We are very proud to be pioneers in online customer service," says OCSE Director **Robert Riddle**. "All of DHR's agencies are upgrading their use of the Internet to offer people easier, faster access to information and services. OCSE was the first to provide an interactive portal, and we are continuing to

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Public Health Leads by Example

During the Healthy Georgia Week kick-off at Two Peachtree Street in July, **Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H.**, director of the Division of Public Health, reminded a crowd of DHR workers, "We need to look at our behavior before we can ask other people to make changes and incorporate healthy living into their everyday habits." She encouraged them to sign the "Healthy Georgia Promise," which says that the signer will stop smoking, get regular health check-ups, eat five fruits and vegetables a day, and be physically active.

Nearly 60 percent of adult Georgians are overweight or obese and don't get the minimum recommended physical activity. In addition, almost one in four Georgians smoke, and 77 percent don't eat the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables daily.

Public Health and the Georgia Cancer Coalition developed the Healthy Georgia Promise for this year's Dodge Tour de Georgia bicycle race in April, which benefited the Coalition. Thousands attended Healthy Georgia Expos, sponsored by General Electric Healthcare. These multimedia interactive health festivals featured at each of the six finish cities of the Tour included exhibits promoting lifestyle choices to prevent cancer and other chronic diseases. During the six-day event more than 2,500 people signed the Healthy Georgia Promise.

In an effort to stem the rising tide of obesity and other behaviors that seriously impact Georgia's health, and because it was so well received at the Tour de Georgia, the Healthy Georgia



Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H., director of DHR's Division of Public Health, signs a Healthy Georgia Promise banner at the kickoff for Healthy Georgia Week in July. Public Health departments are staging events celebrating healthy living across the state.

Promise is now the centerpiece of a statewide public awareness campaign designed to help Georgians learn where they can find wellness, fitness, nutritional and smoking cessation help in their communities.

Make the promise to work on healthy living now. Contact your county health department or call

404/657-6611 to receive more information about the Healthy Georgia Promise.

(Data sources: Georgia Overweight and Obesity fact sheet; Georgia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2002.)

— Lisa Moery

Aging and Disability Resource Centers, continued from Page 2

vices, for people with mental disabilities. Most people with developmental disabilities are cared for at home by family members. In Georgia, more than 15,500 live in households with caregivers aged 60 or older, according to Greene.

After three years, the resource centers are expected to become self-sustaining. In addition to the centers in Atlanta and Augusta, the grant will support planning for resource

centers in other areas of the state. "We also hope we can eventually make the centers' services available to people of all ages," says Greene.

For more information, contact Cathie Berger, Atlanta Regional Commission, 404/463-3100 or Jeanette Cummings, Central Savannah River Area Agency on Aging, 706/210-2013.

— Barbara Joye

Total Rewards on the Web

DHR wants to reward you — with its new "Total Rewards" Web pages on how to improve your work environment and your job satisfaction.

You can learn about teleworking and flexible work schedules; career development; stress management and work/life balance; programs that encourage DHR employees to make suggestions to management; and many other resources that can help you whether you are a supervisor or at entry level. Go to www.dhr.georgia.gov, click on "Employee Intranet" and then "Total Rewards."

Total Rewards is a statewide initiative that addresses all the things state agencies need to do to attract and retain high quality employees. It was launched three years ago in response to recommendations made by a study sponsored by the Georgia Merit System. One of the study's main recommendations was to start or improve programs that supplement pay and benefits, such as employee recognition, teleworking, training opportunities, workforce planning, and safety and diversity management.

The Office of Human Resource Management (now Office of Human Resource Management and Development) spearheaded a department-wide Total Rewards work group, co-chaired by **Celeste Gosier** and **Mary Walker**. Its goal is to increase DHR employees' job satisfaction by raising the quality of life in our workplaces and offering more opportunities for career development. They have reported on work/study programs and teleworking, organized two Best Practices Fairs, and sponsored the 2003 Employee Recognition award ceremony. A work group subcommittee compiled the content for the Total Rewards Web pages, and **Yen Tang** and **Angel Rodriquez** in the Office of Communications developed the new Web site.

— Barbara Joye

Best Practices Fair a Success



Can you imagine playing a card game when you can't use any words and everyone follows slightly different rules not known to the others? (l to r) **Cynthia Carter**, **Hope Reid**, **LiShastas Worthy**, and **Lynda Smith** learn about communication and cultural differences, through an exercise in the Cultural Diversity workshop at OHRMD's Best Practices Fair.

One hundred and seventy-two DHR employees attended a Best Practices Fair and Seminar Event at Two Peachtree in Atlanta on June 3, sponsored by the Workforce Planning Total Rewards Workgroup. The event promoted ways we can feel better about our jobs at DHR and work together more effectively.

Keynote speaker John Dominick of the National Association for Employee Recognition stressed the importance of recognizing the contributions of our co-workers, and not just those we may supervise. We all depend on others to help us do our jobs, but sometimes we don't show our appreciation in a way that keeps our team motivated. He cited studies showing that people are more dedicated to their jobs when they receive more than just a paycheck and benefits. The Total Rewards workshop expanded on this theme.

Other workshops included Cultural Diversity (see photo); Teleworking; Career Banding; Ask the HR Experts; Workplace Ergonomics; Employee Wellness; Fighting Workplace Nega-

tivity; Employee Job Satisfaction; Self Management; Change Management: Creating the Future; and several courses for supervisors, on such topics as employee relations, management and supervision.

Participants praised the wide variety of topics, the opportunity to meet other people from around the state in small groups, the knowledgeable presenters, and "the emphasis on employees and how valuable employees are to an organization." "The information in each session was interesting and could be easily applied to my job responsibilities," one evaluation said.

The 2004 Best Practices Fair was the first one offered to all DHR employees. The ground was laid last year by DHR's Best Practices Fair and Seminar Event for managers. "We plan to come back in 2005 with an even bigger, better fair that anyone in DHR can attend," says **Mary Walker**, co-chair of the Total Rewards Workgroup.

— Barbara Joye

Two Peachtree Street, continued from Page 3

similar alarms sound throughout the stairwell. At the same time these things are happening, an alarm status appears on control consoles, both in the Two Peachtree building and at the central Capitol Police dispatch location to alert those managers of the situation. A person is then sent to actually look at the situation. Until a physical inspection is made to ensure that the area is safe, people may not re-enter the area.

What should you do if you're in an area where an alarm is going off? Leave the area by the nearest stairwell, all the way to the basement exit, and out of the building. Follow the instructions of the building emergency management personnel and go to your designated assembly area.

What should you do if you're in an area where an alarm is NOT going off? You may not even be aware that anything is happening — the system is designed not to disrupt unaffected areas. The system is designed to sound ONLY on the affected floor(s) and two levels above and below there. But if you become aware of a problem — for example, if you've heard that an alarm is sounding in a stairwell, or if someone tells you they heard an alarm — stay where you are. Remain alert to the situation in case the affected area expands to include yours. (You may have to evacuate later.) Follow the instructions of the floor emergency response coordinators.

The bottom line is this: Do not evacuate unless you hear an alarm on your floor (not just from the stairwells) or unless your floor coordinator instructs you to evacuate. Here's

an analogy that might prove useful: When you are at home and hear an emergency vehicle traveling nearby, natural curiosity will lead you to wonder what it is responding to, but that does not mean they're coming to your house and that you have to leave your home.

Elevators: While the elevators will probably continue to operate after an alarm sounds, because they will only automatically stop operation if the elevator lobby is affected, they should not be used. If there is a "real" emergency, the Fire Department may recall them to the first floor lobby, and they will not respond to call buttons on your floor.

Evacuation assembly area: If you should evacuate, do not go through the first floor lobby. Continue down the stairwell to the basement level. Exit the building, go to the assembly area and check in with your floor coordinator.

Mobility limitations: If you cannot use the stairwell, assemble at the freight elevator vestibule on your floor. If there is a true emergency that requires your evacuation, a rescue team will commandeer that elevator and transport you to safety.

Personal safety: If at any time you become concerned about your personal safety in the building, please evacuate, using the stairwells.

Visible smoke or fire: If you see smoke or fire, (1) DO NOT PUT YOURSELF AT RISK. Then do the following if possible without endangering yourself: (2) Put out the fire. (3) Pull the nearest fire station handle. (4) Call 404/656-3281 and report it. (5) Evacuate.

— Tom Heaton

"Ghostout" for Safe Teen Driving

Scary sounds and sights haunted Glascock County's only school on the day before prom night. An automobile lay upside down on the school lawn surrounded by red-stained bodies. A medical helicopter, a hearse, and an ambulance raced to the scene. A girl's voice sent an emotional goodbye message to her friends and family over the school's public address system while emergency medical workers wrapped her in a sheet and placed her in the hearse. Other emergency workers extracted another passenger from the car with the "jaws of life." Police arrived to test and arrest the driver, who staggered nearby, apparently drunk but unhurt.

The "accident" was no surprise. "The grim reaper" had been pulling students out of class every 15 minutes all day, sending them back to class with their faces painted white and instructions to maintain a ghostly silence — representing the American who is killed by drunk driving an average of every 15 minutes.

Glascock County's third biannual "Ghostout" was organized by Glascock Action Partners (GAP), a non-profit community group contracted to provide prevention services for the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases (MHDDAD), in collaboration with the local sheriff's department and fire department; first responders; Emergency Medical Services; the Georgia State Patrol; Sheppard's Funeral Home; and GAP's middle and high school youth

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Who's News



Commissioner **B. J. Walker** has named **Dena Smith** press secretary and director of DHR's Office of Communications. Smith will also supervise the Office of Constituent Services. She formerly headed her own strategic consulting firm, Smith Communications, where she specialized in media relations and crisis management. Earlier she served as director of media relations for the Alisias Group, an Atlanta-based public relations company, and as spokesperson for the City of Detroit's Housing Commission under the administration of former Mayor Dennis Archer. Smith also was a reporter for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution for six years.



The Office of Child Support and Enforcement (OCSE) usually helps parents collect child support from living non-custodial parents, but **Colleen Gunn**, an agent in OCSE's Eastman office, recently helped a mother receive Social Security benefits for her children by identifying a deceased father.

A woman who was trying to establish her twins' paternity through OCSE named a possible father who had been murdered. She received a call from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation saying they had a blood stain card for the

man which could be used for a DNA test, if an independent agency would arrange for the test and release the results. The Eastman OCSE office agreed to help. The results proved that the deceased man was the father of the twins. The mother now collects \$412 per month for each child through the father's Social Security account, which enables her to stay off welfare.

"It sure makes us feel good when we make a positive impact on someone's life," says **Bobbie Hilbun**, manager of OCSE Region 9, which includes Eastman.



The CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) presented the Division of Public Health, **Vital Records Branch** an award for excellent performance in the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program. Georgia was one of only a few states to receive this national recognition. Branch staff from the Registration and Quality Assurance Units won the honor by exceeding contract deliverable performance in 2004. This is the fourth year in a row that Georgia Vital Records has received special appreciation from NCHS. **Michael R. Lavoie**, director of Vital Records, accepted the 2004 award on behalf of branch staff at the National Association for Public Health Statistics annual meeting.

Lavoie also received another award from NCHS for his contributions as chair of the Electronic Birth Registration System's national Re-engineering Project. The products and system recommendations generated by this project have been incorporated into the Georgia Vital Records re-engineering effort to develop a more efficient web-based vital event registration system.



Commissioner **B.J. Walker** named **Gwen Skinner** as director of the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases, effective June 16.

Skinner has over 20 years of experience in Georgia's child welfare and juvenile justice systems. She served as deputy commissioner of the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) for the past five years. For the previous five years, she headed DJJ's Division of Community Programs.



Maximus Child Support Services, a subcontractor for DHR's Office of Child Support Enforcement, recently collected a whopping \$60,000 from one parent who had owed a total of \$85,000.

Enforcement Specialist **Lisa Barksdale** opened the case after the custodial parent had spent years trying to obtain child support on her own. Barksdale implemented an arrest order and referred the case to a credit bureau. A judge ordered the non-custodial parent to pay \$10,000 and \$1,200 a month. At that point the non-custodial parent had a change of heart and agreed to hand over the \$60,000 to settle the case. The couple's daughter will enter college this fall.



What's News

In May Governor Sonny Perdue (center) signed into law the Foster Parents Bill of Rights, House Bill 1580, joined by First Lady Mary Perdue (r) while Rep. Sharon Cooper (l) and members of the Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia (background) looked on. "The Foster Parents Bill of Rights outlines ground rules for a healthy partnership with foster parents," said Governor Perdue. The complete text of the Foster Parents Bill of Rights can be found at http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2003_04/fulltext/hb1580.htm.



On June 10, 225 teenagers from all over Georgia "graduated" from foster care at DHR's annual **Celebration of Excellence**, held at the Fox Theatre in Atlanta. The celebration is a statewide ceremony and scholarship program honoring the academic achievements of young people in the state's foster care system

who are graduating from high school, college, or a vocational program, or receiving their GED. Over \$60,000 in scholarships was awarded, in addition to a check for \$250 from DHR's Independent Living Program and a certificate of recognition for each graduate. Governor and Mrs. Sonny Perdue attended and congratulated the youth.



Pictured, l to r: Normer Adams, Georgia Association of Homes and Services for Children; Bernice Butler, Scholarship Committee member and 2002 scholarship recipient; Juan Lopez, Octavis Taylor and Mikhayla Huckeba, scholarship recipients; Connie Bryant, Wachovia Foundation.

Since July 1, 2004, the Division of Aging Services has been responsible for **Adult Protective Services (APS)**. APS is mandated under the Disabled Adults and Elder Persons Protection Act to address situations of domestic abuse, neglect or exploitation of disabled persons over age 18 or elders over age 65 who are not residents of long-term care facilities. APS also serves victims of self-neglect in this same age group who are not able to meet their basic daily needs because of a physical or mental condition. APS services are available in all 159 counties. The program serves approximately 5,000 active cases per month.

Anyone wishing to report cases of suspected adult abuse, neglect or exploitation should contact the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) office in the county where the adult resides. DFCS will direct the reports to the appropriate APS office.

*"Ghostout" continued from
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council members. It is one among GAP's many activities aimed at preventing drug, alcohol and tobacco use by the county's young people. GAP is the umbrella organization for Communities in Schools of Glascock County, Glascock County Family Connection, and the Glascock County Interagency Council.

Kayla Rachels, a senior student who played the dead girl, said "It was a very eerie experience. People in the crowd were squalling. When the students see an actual member of their student body being loaded in the hearse it really hits home. It's a wonderful program. I think every school should do it." Several other Georgia schools hosted similar events. GAP's surveys show a significant drop in alcohol use by Glascock county teenagers over the past four

years, according to GAP Director Wanda Davis.

In Georgia, substance abuse by teenage drivers costs an estimated \$1.3 billion annually in medical costs and pain or diminished quality of life. However, alcohol use by Georgia's teenagers is on the decline.

"The combined efforts of public health and substance abuse prevention programs based on research, working with so many dedicated community groups, made this improvement possible," says **Brenda J.D. Rowe, PhD.**, MHDDAD's prevention director. "None of us can do it alone. Teens need support for sobriety from everyone around them, especially their parents and peers." Every Georgia county has at least one substance abuse prevention program, either school- or community-based. One hundred and forty-eight of the state's 159 counties have a prevention program funded by the Substance

Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant managed by MHDDAD.

— Barbara Joye



Serving Parents, continued from Page 4

add new features. This will make life easier for thousands of Georgia parents. It will also free up staff to spend more time helping people whose problems need special attention."

OCSE selected the services to offer on the portal based on a survey of 350 parents who receive or pay child support.

By this fall, parents under court order to pay child support will be able to make their payments online. Any parent will be able to find a child support office, apply for services, and check appointment schedules online. "All these opportunities will help parents and increase staff productivity significantly," says Riddle.

— Barbara Joye

A Real Choice: Independence Plus

The Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases (MHDDAD) is developing ways people with disabilities and older adults can manage the services they receive, if they choose to do so. This is made possible by a Real Choice Systems Change grant, which provides \$432,108 in federal funds and \$22,742 in state funds over a three-year period.

Called "Independence Plus Initiative," the project is a collaborative effort among DHR's divisions of Aging Services and MHDDAD and the Georgia Department of Community Health. With the help of a consultant, APS Healthcare Bethesda, these agencies are meeting with consumers, family members, advocates, and service providers to design a comprehensive system of self-directed services and supports for use by older adults and people with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, and traumatic brain injuries. The grant also provides for the design of a pilot project for adults with mental illness.

"Many people with disabilities can be their own best managers for the services they need to function well in their communities instead of institutions," says **Darlene Meador**, Independence Plus project director. "First, we need to figure out ways to help them and their families to work with a budget for the services; how to make sure the services they receive are high quality; and how to handle emergencies."

— Barbara Joye

Can people be trained to live on their own?

Live their own life, have their own home?

Chose their own staff they can hire or fire?

Have their own transportation and not be left in the "marked bus" mire?

Will they have real names and faces to go with their choice?

Or will they be the "consumer" with the same system voice?

— From a poem written by Gail Bottoms, a self-advocate and member of the Georgia Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, at a Real Choice Systems Grant application planning meeting.